

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-10

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFORPN

SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S PRESS CONFERENCE, 4/22/76

THE FOLLOWING EXCERPTS ON PANAMA ARE FROM AN UNOFFICIAL
TRANSCRIPT AND ARE FOR EMBASSY BACKGROUND ONLY:

Q. MR. SECRETARY, ISN'T NEGOTIATIONS ON THE PANAMA CANAL
AN EXAMPLE OF THE SORT OF THINK THAT'S BEING DEFERRED UNTIL
AFTER THE ELECTION? AND IN THAT CONNECTION, DOESN'T THE
CONTROVERSY OVER THE CANAL IN A WAY HELP YOUR NEGOTIATING
POSITION--TO SHOW HOW MUCH OPPOSITION, AND TO SHOW HOW
SLOWLY YOU HAVE TO GO?

A. WELL, I DON'T WANT TO ENCOURAGE ANY MORE OF THE STATE-
MENTS FROM--WHICH WE HAVE SUFFERED WITH RESPECT TO THE
PANAMA CANAL. WITH RESPECT TO THE PANAMA CANAL, THERE ARE
A NUMBER OF KEY ISSUES THAT HAVE TO BE SETTLED BEFORE WE
CAN BE SURE THAT AN AGREEMENT IS POSSIBLE. WE BELIEVE THAT
THE BASIC ISSUE IS: UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS THE FREE AND
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OPEN AND NEUTRAL ACCESS TO THE CANAL--WHICH IS ESSENTIAL

FOR THE UNITED STATES--CAN BEST BE GUARANTEED. AND UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER NATIONS OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE CAN BEST BE PRESERVED.

IT IS OUR JUDGEMENT THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS THAT ARE NOW GOING ON ARE THE BEST WAY OF DOING THIS. THEIR PACE IS IMPORTANTLY DETERMINED BY THE ABILITY TO SETTLE SPECIFIC ISSUES. AND THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE CURRENT DEBATE INFLUENCES THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS CAN BE ARGUED ON BOTH SIDES.

Q. THE PRESIDENT, AS I UNDERSTAND HIM, HAS SAID THAT HIS PURPOSE IN THE PANAMA CANAL NEGOTIATIONS IS TO RETAIN U.S. RIGHTS OF CONTROL, MAINTENANCE AND DEFENSE THROUGH THE LIFE OF THE PENDING TREATY. IS THAT YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE NEGOTIATIONS--AND IS THAT THE PERCEPTION OF THE PANAMANIAN AS YOU UNDERSTAND IT?

A. THAT IS SUBSTANTIALLY MY PERCEPTION OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. BUT IN ANY EVENT, THE UNITED STATES, REGARDLESS OF CONTROL AND DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS, WILL INSIST ON THE PERMANENT, FREE, AND NEUTRAL AND OPEN PASSAGE OF AMERICAN SHIPS THROUGH THE CANAL.

Q. WILL WE SHARE CONTROL AND MAINTENANCE DURING THE LIFE OF THE TREATY?

A. THAT IS CORRECT. KISSINGER

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